

Exploring notions of victimhood through the narratives of criminally exploited children

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Shattered Lives, Stolen Futures

‘too many exploited children experience a criminal justice response as the primary intervention’

(Jay Review, 2024:77)

- **Failed by the systems designed to protect them**
 - No statutory definition hinders safeguarding
 - Differences between and within sectors
- **Children must prove their victimhood**
 - Contrasts with welfare principle

Notions of victimhood



Data collection (n = 18)

Challenges

- Under-served group
 - Engagement fluctuates
- Risk to young person
 - Grooming: arrested, taken into care
 - Violence: 'snitches'

Solutions

- Trusted worker
 - Informal chat (n = 8)
 - Focus group (n = 3)
- Researcher
 - Interview (n = 7)

“Show them the money”

*“All I want is a healthy life, not struggling with money. I don’t want much,
I just want to live nice, like everyone else”*

(Lewis, aged 16)

- **Absolute poverty**
 - Basic needs unmet
 - Food, shelter, warmth
- **Relative poverty**
 - ‘Cruel optimism’ (Bakkali, 2019)
- **Exercising agency**



“Some people are just broken”

“Some people are just broken. How can I say it? I don’t want to be coming on a spiritual thing but then deep down some of them are just broken ...that changes their minds and views and their anger, emotions, it controls it all”

(Jordan, aged 16)

- **Individual level**
 - Socio-emotional needs, additional learning needs, mental health
- **Inter-personal level**
 - Abuse, parent mental health, parent substance misuse, separation
- **Societal level**
 - Increasing poverty, limited opportunities

“It’s just the way it is”

- Hopelessness

- Lack of expectation and ambition

“All these petty little jobs that no one would want to apply and study for, they’ll just give it to these guys who fail in school ... Shove that. There’s always hope. There’s always an opportunity. It can work or it can go down the other route, the guy could be selling drugs to get you money. It can go both ways”

(Jordan, aged 16)

“I got kicked out of school. People need to tell them [young people] about the consequences of being kicked out of school ... Maybe it would have been helpful if I’d had the option of a break from school, but not leaving forever”

(Megan, aged 17)

- Powerlessness
- Lack of inclusivity
 - Damaged dignity
 - Distancing children from resources (Daiute and Fine, 2003)

“Then there’s the violence”

“Fast forward. It may seem glamorous but then there’s the violence and people being killed and buried in concrete graves”

(Rob, aged 25+)

- **Resigned to exploitation**
 - Debt bondage
 - ‘Snitches get stitches’ (Jordan, aged 16)
- **Violence accepted if no other available options**
 - Risks minimised
 - Retained sense of self
 - Reject victimhood label

Notions of victimhood

- **Limited options**
 - Unmet needs - socio-economic landscape - available resources
- **Offered a false sense of hope**
 - Peers, role models
- **Paradox**
 - Young people believe they are exercising a choice to improve their lives
 - Trapped in an environment of victimisation and violence
- **Professional perceptions**
 - Adultification
 - Gendered stereotypes

Lived experience

- Add film here

- **Complex Safeguarding Wales**
 - Youth Charter
 - Research-informed
 - Co-produced with Peer Action Collective Wales



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Information for practitioners

Identifying child criminal exploitation

Responding to child criminal exploitation

Sector-specific guidance

Speaking to young people

Youth Charter

We developed the Youth Charter by working with young people so that their experiences shape practitioner responses to child criminal exploitation.

The Charter shows practitioners what is important to young people, in their own words. Drawing on the principles of the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, our Youth Charter was developed in consultation with the Peer Action Collective (PAC) based at Media

Related links

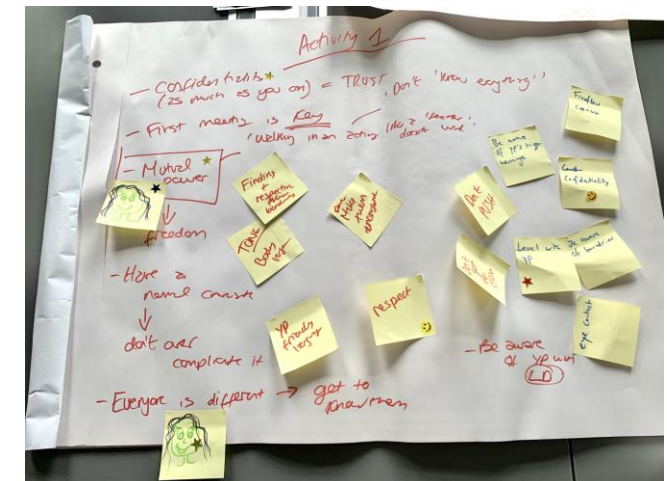
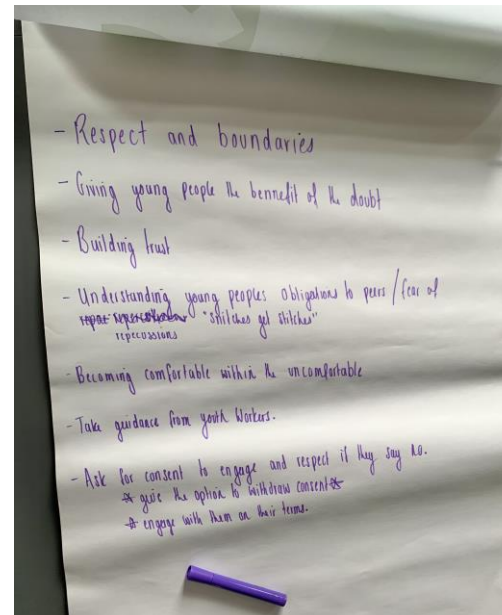
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Related documents

Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit

[View document](#)

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Ask us

Give us the option about how, when and if we engage with you.

Be yourself

Introduce who you are and why you want to talk to us.

Create a safe place to talk

Find a safe, comfortable place to talk to us. Ask us where we would like to meet you.

Don't assume you know us

We are all different. Take time to get to know us and what we may find upsetting.

Explain your role and responsibilities

Be clear and upfront about your safeguarding roles and responsibilities. Tell us what information you must share and whether you will tell us before this happens.

Focus on us, not what information you need

Don't just bombard us with questions. Let the conversation flow by taking part. Don't just write notes.



Give us time

It may not be the right time for us to tell you what is happening. We may have obligations to our friends, or we may be afraid of repercussions from exploiters.

Help us to trust you

Be honest. Tell us about your links and roles with other practitioners. It can be distressing if we don't know who you are talking to about us. But it can also be positive if we know you are working with other people to help us.

Include us in decision-making

Encourage and support us to make decisions about our lives. This includes what support we receive, the services we engage with and the activities we take part in.

Jargon excludes us

Talk to us at our level and keep jargon to a minimum.



Keep our needs in mind

We have different backgrounds and cultures. We may not want to engage in the same way. We may not feel comfortable in group meetings or activities.

Listen to us

Be prepared to hear what we have to say. Respect our views and don't assume you know us.

Maintain boundaries

While we want you to get to know us, this is still a service setting. Encourage us to develop a practitioner-young person relationship.

Don't try to be our friends.

Never force us

Be mindful of our body language and use of eye contact. Give us our personal space and be sensitive to our needs and triggers. Don't force us to disclose to you.

Only promise what you can deliver

Don't make false promises or say you will do things unless you know you can do them. Be realistic about what you can and can't do.

Prepare yourself to feel uncomfortable

It can be difficult to hear what we have to say, for a range of reasons. Don't judge us. Just listen.

Query, but don't question

Check you understand what we've told you, but don't question or interrogate us.

Report back to us

Tell us when you will do things and what will happen next. Let us know what actions have been taken since we met you.

Say goodbye

Let us know if you are changing jobs or roles. Say goodbye to us and introduce us to the person taking over your role.



Thank you for listening

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